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Identical letters dated 26 April 2017 from the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

The attack which took place on 4 April 2017 in Khan Cheikhoun, Syria killed more than 80 people, 50 of them instantly, and injured more than 500. Given the seriousness of that attack, France has decided to declassify some of the findings from its ongoing investigations.

Our intelligence services have come to the clear conclusion that the chemical agent used in that attack was sarin. Samples, including human samples, as well as munitions debris were collected at the Khan Cheikhoun site immediately following the attack. We have been able to analyse the samples collected at the site of the Khan Cheikhoun attack against the chemical samples kept by our services since the beginning of the conflict.

Our services have established that the sarin used during the 4 April attack is the same as the one used in a similar attack in Saraqeb, Syria on 29 April 2013. The presence of a substance called hexamine is characteristic of the sarin produced by the Syrian regime and is typical of the manufacturing process developed in the Syrian laboratory ESRB. That substance is present in both the samples collected on 29 April 2013 and those collected on 4 April 2017.

Our services have also confirmed that a Sukhoi aircraft had taken off from the base of al-Chayrat in the morning of 4 April.

France transmitted this information to the Organization for the Prohibition of the Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on Tuesday, 25 April and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Jean-Marc Ayrault, made it public on Wednesday, 26 April.

France is deeply concerned about these findings, which confirm once again that Syria has failed to fulfil its international commitments: it has continued to use chemical weapons repeatedly and has maintained a clandestine chemical programme.

Beyond Syria, this situation weakens the international chemical non-proliferation regime and threatens our collective security system. We have a responsibility to ensure that the Syrian chemical arsenal is dismantled, and that the Syrian regime is prevented once and for all from using chemical weapons.

France looks forward to the report of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission, a professional, technical and impartial mechanism which must have all our trust and support.

I should be grateful if this letter and its annex* could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) François **Delattre**

* The annex is being circulated in the language of submission only.

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Annex to the identical letters dated 26 April 2017 from the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

[Original: English and French]

National assessment

Chemical attack of 4 April 2017 (Khan Cheikhoun)

Clandestine Syrian chemical programme

This document is based on declassified intelligence from France's own sources.

On 4 April 2017, air strikes against civilians in the city of Khan Sheikhoun killed more than 80 people. According to our experts, the symptoms observed immediately afterwards (pupil contraction, suffocation, bluing of lips, white foam on faces, convulsions), the high number of deaths, and the fact that certain responders and medical staff suffered secondary contamination are consistent with the use of a highly lethal neurotoxic agent. This has now been confirmed scientifically.

These strikes come in the context of continuous use since 2013 of chemical weapons or chemical agents in Syria, particularly during air strikes, including after the Syrian regime committed to dismantling its chemical weapons arsenal on 25 October 2013. France has collected biomedical and environmental samples and munitions and pieces of munitions in Syria on several occasions, and has been able to confirm the use of chlorine and sarin several times. The attached table lists France's evaluations.

1. **– Technical analysis of the chemical attack on 4 April**

a) France has deployed the required resources to obtain its own samples from the alleged sarin attack on 4 April 2017 in Idlib Governorate.

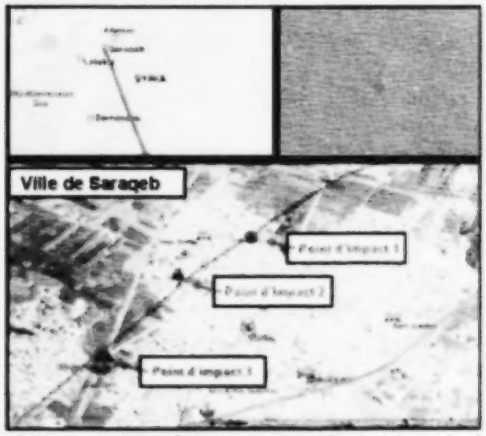
b) The analyses carried out by French experts on the environmental samples collected at one of the impact points of the chemical attack at Khan Sheikhoun on 4 April 2017 reveal the presence of sarin, of a specific secondary product (diisopropyl methylphosphonate – DIMP) formed during synthesis of sarin from isopropanol and DF (methylphosphonyl difluoride), and hexamine. Analysis of biomedical samples also shows that a victim of the Khan Sheikhoun attack, a sample of whose blood was taken in Syria on the very day of the attack, was exposed to sarin.

France therefore independently and categorically confirms that sarin was used on 4 April. The United States, the United Kingdom, Turkey and the Director-General of the OPCW have also established that sarin was employed on the basis of analysis of biomedical samples.

c) According to the intelligence obtained by the French services, the process of synthesizing sarin, developed by the Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC) and employed by the Syrian armed forces and security services, involves the use of hexamine as a stabilizer. DIMP is also known as a by-product generated by this process.

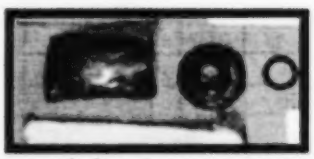
d) This intelligence on the process used by the regime, which is a sign of its responsibility in the attack on 4 April, is based notably on the analysis of the content of an unexploded grenade which was used with certainty by the Syrian regime during the Saraqib attack on 29 April 2013. That mid-afternoon, a helicopter arriving from the north-east flew over the city of Saraqib at high altitude. Three unidentified objects, emitting white smoke, were dropped on neighbourhoods to the west of the city, on a north-south trajectory.

According to France, only the Syrian armed forces had helicopters and could therefore be responsible for dropping these three objects.



Timeline of the dropping of three unidentified objects by helicopter

At the first point of impact, there were no victims. At the second point of impact, one person was killed and about 20 injured. An exploded grenade was found in the wreckage. Analysis of biomedical and environmental samples collected by the French services revealed the presence of compounds consistent with exposure to sarin. This analysis was confirmed by the United Nations in December 2013.



Exploded grenade found at second point of impact

At the third point of impact, an unexploded grenade was found in a crater on a dirt track. This munition was very similar in appearance to that found at the second point of impact.

Crater at the third point of impact where the grenade was found

Once the French services were sure of the traceability of the grenade, analyses were carried out.

Munition found at third point of impact and an x-ray of it

The chemical analyses carried out showed that it contained a solid and liquid mix of approximately 100ml of sarin at an estimated purity of 60%. Hexamine, DF and a secondary product, DIMP, were also identified. Modelling, on the basis of the crater's characteristics, confirmed with a very high level of confidence that it was dropped from the air.

e) The presence of the same chemical compounds in the environmental samples collected during the attacks on Khan Sheikhoun on 4 April 2017 and on Saraqib on 29 April 2013 has therefore been formally confirmed by France. The sarin present in the munitions used on 4 April was produced using the same manufacturing process as that used during the sarin attack perpetrated by the Syrian regime in Saraqib. Moreover, the presence of hexamine indicates that this manufacturing process is that developed by the Scientific Studies and Research Centre for the Syrian regime.

2. – Militarily analysis of the tactical situation around 4 April 2017

a) The 4 April attack came after the Syrian armed forces and security services and their supporters launched a counter-offensive in the sector of Hama, responding to the progress of armed groups and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham in the north of Hama since 22 March.

On 23 March, Syrian elite forces, the Qawat Al-Nimr, along with Hezbollah and the Iranian Quds Force, were redeployed to the area. Syrian and Russian air support has also been focused on this sector. On 2 April, the Syrian armed forces and security services and their supporters pushed back the front line, although Damascus failed to fully win back the territory captured by the armed groups in March. Since then, the regime has largely regained territory in the Hama sector and continues to pressure the opposition: further conventional bombing has been observed in the Hama region.

b) The French services are aware in particular of a Sukhoi Su-22 bomber which took off from the Shayrat Airbase on the morning of 4 April and launched up to six strikes around Khan Sheikhoun.

c) As regards the general organization of the command chain, the French intelligence services assess that only Bashar al-Assad and a few of the most influential members of his inner circle are authorized to give the order to use chemical weapons.

3. – Analysis of the presence of armed groups in Hama and of their capabilities

a) While it has been confirmed that mustard gas attacks have been carried out by Daesh in Syria since 2015, France assesses that the theory of an attack by the armed groups using a neurotoxic agent on 4 April is not credible. France has no information confirming the possession of sarin by these groups.

1. Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) was born from the merger of several radical factions with the Al-Qaeda movement Jabhat Fatah al-Sham after the fall of Aleppo. Pragmatic coordination between HTS and other armed groups present in the Hama sector was observed in late March. To the knowledge of the French services, none of these groups has the capability to employ a neurotoxic agent or the air capacities required.

2. The theory of an attack perpetrated by Daesh is not plausible either, as Daesh is not present in the sector of Hama. Moreover, the French intelligence services have not observed that Daesh has sarin or air capacities.

b) Neither do the French services assess that the theory of a staged attack or manipulation by the opposition is credible, particularly because of the massive influx in a very limited time towards hospitals in Syria and Turkey, and the simultaneous, massive uploading of videos showing symptoms of the use of neurotoxic agents.

4. – Continuation since 2013 of a clandestine Syrian chemical weapons programme

a) In a previous declassified national report in 2013, the French services laid out their knowledge of the Syrian chemical weapons programme and chemical attacks perpetrated by the regime. They noted that sarin was principally used in binary form: a mixture of methylphosphonyl difluoride (DF), a key precursor in the manufacture of sarin, and isopropanol produced just before use.

France informed the OPCW that Syria's explanations on the quantities of DF declared – approximately 20 tonnes – as having been used in tests or lost in accidents were exaggerated. Moreover, France has observed since 2014 Syrian attempts to acquire dozens of tonnes of isopropanol. The Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) from the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW has been unable to obtain any proof of the veracity of Syria's declarations. The OPCW itself has identified major inconsistencies in Syria's explanations concerning the presence of sarin derivatives on several sites where no activity relating to the toxin had been declared.

b) On the basis of the conclusions of the DAT and its own intelligence, France assesses that major doubts remain as to the accuracy, exhaustiveness and sincerity of the decommissioning of Syria's chemical weapons arsenal. In particular, France assesses that Syria has maintained a capacity to produce or stock sarin, despite its commitment to destroy all stocks and capacities. Lastly, France assesses that Syria has not declared tactical munitions (grenades and rockets) such as those repeatedly used since 2013.

c) The Damascus regime has continued to employ chemical weapons against its population since Syria's accession to the CWC on 13 October 2013. There have been over 100 allegations of such use, concerning chlorine as well as sarin.

Since 2014, the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) has published several reports confirming the use of chemical weapons against civilians in Syria. The UN-OPCW Joint Investigation Mechanism (JIM) has investigated nine allegations of chemical weapons employment. In its reports in August and October 2016, the JIM attributed three cases of employment of chlorine to the Damascus regime and one of mustard gas to Daesh.

*

Based on this overall evaluation and on reliable and consistent intelligence collected by our Services, France assesses that the Syrian armed forces and security services perpetrated a chemical attack using sarin against civilians in Khan Sheikhoun on 4 April 2017.

ALLEGATIONS OF USE OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS IN SYRIA SINCE 2012

Table legend:

Allegations of use of chemical weapons that the French services have not been able to confirm with great reliability	[redacted]	Strong presumption of use of sarin by the Syrian regime	Strong presumption of the use of chlorine by the Syrian regime	Mustard gas attack attributed to Daesh

CITY	REGION	DATE	SYMPTOMS OF VICTIMS
Kafr Takharim Salqin	60km west of Aleppo	14 October 2012	
Harasta	East Ghouta	19 November 2012	
Homs		23 December 2012	
Khan al-Assal	Aleppo	19 March 2013	Suffocation
Al-Otaiba	30 km east of Damascus	19 March 2013	Pupil constriction, convulsions, muscle spasms
Baba Amr	Homs	20 March 2013	

CITY	REGION	DATE	SYMPTOMS OF VICTIMS
Darayya	South-west of Damascus	28 March 2013	
Al-Otaiba	30 km east of Damascus	9 April 2013	
Jobar	East Ghouta	9 April 2013	Epidermal inflammation and burns
Aleppo		13 April 2013	Hallucinations, vomiting and mucositis
[redacted]			
Darayya	South-west of Damascus	25 April 2013	
[redacted]			
Adra	North-east of Damascus	23 May 2013	
Harasta	East Ghouta	26 May 2013	
Al-Bahariya	East Ghouta	10 June 2013	Suffocation and partial paralysis

CITY	REGION	DATE	SYMPTOMS OF VICTIMS
Zamalka	East Ghouta	24 June 2013	Tremors, muscle contractions and pupil contraction
Sayyidah Zaynab	South of Damascus	7 July 2013	
Douma	North-east of Damascus	4 August 2013	Breathing difficulties, convulsions and oral mucositis
[redacted]			
Jobar **Zamalka**	East Ghouta	12 September 2013	Breathing difficulties and hypersalivation
Kafr Zita	**Hama**	**11 April 2014**	**Suffocation, coughing and disorientation**
Jobar	East Ghouta	3 April 2014	
Kafr Zita	Hama	20 April 2014	Coughing and suffocation
Tall Manis		**21 April 2014**	
Al-Tamanah	Idlib	23 April 2014	Coughing and suffocation

CITY	REGION	DATE	SYMPTOMS OF VICTIMS
Arbin	East Ghouta	5 June 2014	Breathing difficulties, nausea, headaches, loss of consciousness, eye reddening, facial inflammation and total loss of feeling
Jobar	East Ghouta	12 August 2014	Reduced consciousness, breathing difficulties and eye irritation
Daraa		19 August 2014	
Hatita al-Jarsh	East Ghouta	14 September 2014	
Adra	North-east of Damascus	24 September 2014	Breathing difficulties, convulsions
Deir ez-Zor		27 September 2014	
Tel Bisseh		3 November 2014	
Nawa	25km north-west of Homs	24 February 2015	Coughing
Qminas Sarmin	Idlib	16 March 2015	
Sarmin	Idlib	23 March 2015	
Binnish	Idlib	24 March 2015	No visible symptoms
Sarmin	Idlib	26 March 2015	

CITY	REGION	DATE	SYMPTOMS OF VICTIMS
Idlib Governorate		31 March 2015	
Ghab Plain	Idlib	3 April 2015	
Douar Al Mihrab Karaj al-Bolman	Idlib	16 April 2015	
Feliyon Korin	Idlib	16 April 2015	
Tamana'a Kafr Najd	Idlib	17 April 2015	Suffocation
Edles	Idlib	24 April 2015	
Sahen	Idlib	24 April 2015	
Aleppo		24 April 2015	
Sahl al Ghab		25 April 2015	
Nirab	South-east of Aleppo	25 April 2015	
Hama		26 April 2015	
Kafr Oued	Idlib	26 April 2015	Suffocation
Al-Hawash	Idlib	26 April 2015	

CITY	REGION	DATE	SYMPTOMS OF VICTIMS
Al-Mansoura		26 April 2015	
Jabal Zawiya	Idlib	26 April 2015	
Al-Marjeh	Aleppo	27 April 2015	
Al-Mastouma	Idlib	27 April 2015	
Karsaa Kansafrah	Idlib	28 April 2015	
Saraqib	Idlib	29 April 2015	Suffocation
Al-Hawash	Hama	29 April 2015	
Sahl al Ghab Qastoun	Hama	29 April 2015	Suffocation
Saraqib	Idlib	2 May 2015	
Kansafra	Idlib Governorate	2 May 2015	
Kafr Battikh	Idlib	6 May 2014	
Al-Janudiyah	Idlib	7 May 2015	
Al-Bashiriya	Idlib	10 May 2015	
Al-Sarmaniya	Idlib	10 May 2015	

CITY	REGION	DATE	SYMPTOMS OF VICTIMS
Aqrab	Hama	14 May 2015	
Mashmashan	Idlib	15 May 2015	
Sarmin	Idlib	16 May 2015	
Al-Kostan	Idlib	17 May 2015	
Mashmashan	Idlib	17 May 2015	
Jisr al-Shughur	Idlib	18 May 2015	
Mashmashan	Idlib	19 May 2015	
Aleppo	Aleppo	13 June 2015	
Jobar	East Ghouta	13 June 2015	
Al-Janoudiah		8 June 2015	
Jisr al-Shughur	Idlib	7 June 2015	
Aleppo	Aleppo	7 June 2015	
Al-Hasakah		28-30 June 2015	
Al-Zabdani		5 July 2015	
Al-Rashidin neighbourhood	Aleppo	7 July 2015	Suffocation

CITY	REGION	DATE	SYMPTOMS OF VICTIMS
Marea		21 August 2015	
Saqba	East Ghouta	23 August 2015	Convulsions
Marea		1 September 2015	
Moadamiyeh	East Ghouta	22 December 2015	Heavy bleeding, breathing difficulties, eye irritation
Al-Nashabiyah	East Ghouta	23 January 2016	
Moadamiyeh	East Ghouta	31 January 2016	
Qabaun	East Ghouta	3 April 2016	
Handarat	North of Aleppo	8 April 2016	
Handarat	North of Aleppo	14 April 2016	
Al-Amqiyah	Hama	18 April 2016	Suffocation
Ein Tarma	East Ghouta	Early July	Suffocation
Saraqib	Idlib	1 August 2016	Breathing difficulties, suffocation, eye irritation, vomiting, headaches
Aleppo	Aleppo	2 August 2016	Breathing difficulties
Aleppo	Aleppo	10 August 2016	Breathing difficulties

CITY	REGION	DATE	SYMPTOMS OF VICTIMS
Ein Terma and/or Jobar	East Ghouta	Late August-early September 2016	Suffocation
Aleppo	**Aleppo**	**6 September 2016**	**Breathing difficulties, eye irritation, dizziness, vomiting**
Kafr Naya	North of Aleppo	16 September 2016	Breathing difficulties
Jobar	East Ghouta	19 September 2016	
Aleppo	Aleppo	25 September 2016	
Kafr Zita	**Hama**	**1 October 2016**	**Breathing difficulties, eye irritation, dizziness, vomiting**
Aleppo	Aleppo	2 October 2016	
Latamneh	Hama	17 October 2016	
Latamneh	**Hama**	**25 October 2016**	**Breathing difficulties, eye irritation, dizziness, vomiting**
Western Aleppo	**Aleppo**	**30 October 2016**	
Western Aleppo	**Aleppo**	**2 November 2016**	**Breathing difficulties**
Khan al-Asal	**South-west of Aleppo**	**11 November 2016**	**Breathing difficulties**
Eastern Aleppo	**Eastern Aleppo**	**18 November 2016**	**Suffocation**

CITY	REGION	DATE	SYMPTOMS OF VICTIMS
Eastern Aleppo	Eastern Aleppo	20 November 2016	Suffocation
Eastern Aleppo	Eastern Aleppo	21 November 2016	
Eastern Aleppo	Eastern Aleppo	22 November 2016	Breathing difficulties
Eastern Aleppo	Eastern Aleppo	23 November 2016	Breathing difficulties, eye irritation
Eastern Aleppo	Eastern Aleppo	28 November 2016	Suffocation
Southern Aleppo	Southern Aleppo	8 December 2016	Suffocation
Southern Aleppo	Southern Aleppo	9 December 2016	Suffocation
Southern Aleppo	Southern Aleppo	10 December 2016	
Uqairabat	Hama	12 December 2016	Pupil contraction, convulsions, respiratory distress, hypersalivation
Wadi Barada valley	North-west of Damascus	3 January 2017	
Bassimeh	North-west of Damascus	5-6 January 2017	Irritations
Al Midaani	East Ghouta	Late March 2017	
Al-Majar	East Ghouta	30 January 2017	Breathing difficulties, eye irritation
Arbin	East Ghouta	7 February 2017	

CITY	REGION	DATE	SYMPTOMS OF VICTIMS
Arbin	East Ghouta	9 February 2017	Breathing difficulties, loss of consciousness, foaming at the mouth, irritation
Arbin	East Ghouta	10 February 2017	
Housh Aldhawahra	East Ghouta	20 February 2017	
Harasta	East Ghouta	26 February 2017	Breathing difficulties
Latamneh	Hama	25 March 2017	Breathing difficulties
Latamneh	Hama	30 March 2017	Breathing difficulties, loss of consciousness, foaming at the mouth, irritation
[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
Latamneh	Hama	6 April 2017	